

CHILDREN'S COUNTRY HOLIDAYS FUND.

NATURE STUDY AND RECREATION COMMITTEE.

18, BUCKINGHAM STREET, W.C.,

5TH DECEMBER, 1906.

DEAR MADAM,

The Nature Study and Recreation Committee at their last Meeting desired to express to you all their very cordial appreciation of the help many of you have given them in their Summer's work on behalf of the children.

You will like to hear that Lantern Lectures were given to some 3,570 children; Nature Talks in their schools to 1,150 others; whilst Rambles on Hampstead Heath and Wimbledon Common, in Epping Forest and other accessible places, where kind guides were also available, were thoroughly enjoyed by 564 boys and girls. In almost every instance tea was provided after the rambles by child-loving friends.

Just before the children left town for their fortnight's holiday, a letter, of which I enclose a copy, was issued to them, with the result that we received from them 2,600 replies, as well as 87 collections of flowers, leaves, grasses, shells, &c., and 285 sketches. These have all been judged, and show that 275 are worthy of prizes, 463 of certificates of merit, and 851 of mementos, intended as an encouragement to further effort.

The great advance shewn in the way the children observe and appreciate Nature is, the Committee feel, in no small measure the result of the kind work among the little folk given by so many helpers, who, loving Nature themselves, have been inspired to "do good and communicate."

I am,

Yours faithfully,

HENRIETTA C. BARNETT,

Chairwoman of the Nature Study and Recreation Committee, C. C. H. F.

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"I have here made only a nosegay of culled flowers, and have brought nothing of my own but the string that ties them."

"I am but a disposer and gatherer of other men's stuff."

Most people know of the Children's Country Holiday Fund, and that its object is to give the children of the London poor a fortnight's holiday in the country, but perhaps some of us are not aware of the pains taken towards developing their observation and appreciation of the country. The children are encouraged on their return to school to write letters containing their impressions, and it has been my privilege to look through 480 letters written by boys and girls belonging to Standard IV.

Some few of the children, girls especially, give details of the joyous excitement and preparation of the night before the start.

"I went early to bed and curled my hair ready for the Country Holiday fun." "I got out my blue frock." In more than one letter we read: "I took off my best clothes as soon as I got there"; it therefore follows that the story of the journeys must come from the boys.

"It was rather a muddle getting us into the train," says one boy, but the muddle did not affect their spirits, for we read of continual feasting and singing. A boy regrets "there were only two mouth organs in our carriage." One party of children had an hour to wait on their way, "so we went and had a paddle."

On their arrival at their various destinations they were met by "the victor," "my lady," "my lady's husband." "There were some carts waiting for us, we just drove round the corner, and some servants came out, and they had trays full of cups of water and buns; we had to give the cups back." "We were taken round to the cottager ladies," and I gathered from many letters how good and kind these ladies were. "My lady" and her motherliness is well to the fore in two-thirds of the letters, and I could read the affectionate accent the children would put on the "my." It is interesting to notice the one exception to this rule of gratitude to "our ladies." A small boy in the middle of writing about something else burst out: "My lady was not kind, she did not

give me breakfast next morning." That word *next* reveals an overnight tragedy.

Here are some expressions of gratitude. "I do not think I could have had a better lady, she would not let me do any work. I thought it was a pity to see one chopping wood, another cleaning until her arms were quite red."

"I send my best respects to our dear lady, her husband and children."

"I do think Mrs. D. and the others were so kind, they prepared cakes, ginger beer, and the gramaphone for us, but it was broken."

"The lady who minded us was very kind, and gave us suitable food."

I was surprised to find that the boys more than the girls felt lonely at first. One boy writes:

Dear Madam,

"It was very lonely, you cannot get mates all at once," and later in the same letter he says: "We had good mates, they shared everything with us, and we did with them." That first day's loneliness was evidently something to remember, for the letters were not written until the children returned.

Many remark as a matter of curiosity that there were no theatres near, though one boy went four times in two weeks! A dreary little girl writes: "I only went somewhere sometimes, so I never saw nothing, there were no theatres or places of amusement."

There seems no undue interest in their food, the remarks are most objective—

"Rabbits is delicious food if you can get anyone to catch them."

"We did not go out for the whole day, because our lady said we ought to have a hot dinner every day."

"We had pudding every day and then our dinner." "The cakes are different to London cakes."

Considerable interest was taken in the sun and clouds. A boy writes: "I got up at three to see the sun rise; it looked over a cloud first, and then shone on all the earth."

A girl writes: "Then I saw the lovely blue sky by morn;

at night the sky was red, and at morn again the sky is blue and fresh. Then I heard the cuckoo, and the thrush was singing gaily in the trees." "The sunset put me in mind of many different things, it put me in mind of a little ship out at sea with oars and all complete."

"Our lady took us on Sunday evening up a hill to see the sun rising down."

Here is a charming note about the rainbow. "The rainbow was all colours, a row of red, yellow, and blue; there was another one trying to do the same."

Two cheerful people write: "The rainy days were gloomy and dull, but they did not make us gloomy and dull, we were happy"; and "after the rain the flowers seemed fresh as well as me."

I can picture the prim little girl who begins her letter—"Dear Madam,—I have been in the country, and I know what I have seen;" it is a matter of regret that she keeps her knowledge out of her letter.

The boy who wrote the letter I am to quote is to me peculiarly annoying; he is one of the very few I do not wish to meet. "Dear Madam,—I have been in the country. I observed the habits of the people, they are good and homely. I observed they carried their dead in a different way. I observed that crows follow the cows. I observed that the people were strong, healthy, and good-natured."

One of my best friends is the girl who writes: "My lady had some big boys, it is good to know big, honest boys." There is no lack of deep down appreciation and feeling; this letter from a girl of nine seems to me particularly charming: "Dear Madam,—I went away with the Children's Country Holiday Fund.

"I think the country is a beautiful place. The beautiful meadows and cornfields.

"The nice orchards and the rosy apples and the dear sheep.

"The birds did sing so sweetly as well.

"The roads are so different to the noisy streets in London.

"The pretty and lovely flowers, and the pretty large oak trees with their spreading branches. I should like to live in the country always. The threshing machine was very strange and wonderful."

What sympathetic delight we must feel with the children who can write like this:

"I noticed the ducks, their long necks made me happy because I liked to look at them."

"I heard the birds singing in the clear blue sky, while I listened tenderly."

"It is quite a treat to take a flower and smell it. You will say 'it is a foolish girl that tells us that a flower smells nice,' but I'll tell you why it is nice to smell, because it is just broken and it is fresh."

Here is a letter from a *real* Nature student: "One day I went in the woods, a rabbit was sitting by its hole, so I crept round the trees and climbed one of them, and I sat on a branch and watched it. Presently a huntsman came along and the rabbit saw him and ran away. The little ones jumped out of the hole and five were shot, and one escaped and it followed its mother. When the huntsman had gone, the two rabbits came back again, they went down the hole to see if they could find the others, so they came up again and went in another hole, and another and another. After a few minutes they came back and went down the hole and returned no more, so I returned home."

Here are some good notes about birds, written by a girl. "I would like to tell you about the birds. Some of them had a certain tree of their own, and a leafy tree too. They used to sing beautiful songs. Then I watched the thrushes, they were the birds for singing; they sang splendidly. Then came larks, they are beautiful singers too. The swallows could sing nicely too."

A boy who sent a collection of pressed flowers and leaves, writes: "The celery leaf is like three acorn leaves, and there is one on each side and one at the top; they are not three leaves but one, and each one is different. The adalier is a very nice flower for a button-hole, and it is red, and it has a lot of petals, and it is a yellowish colour, and the middle is like the adalier bud and the same colour and the adalier does not grow in pots but in a garden."

Another boy writes: "One day I had a ride on a pony; when I got off I looked at it, it was a nice creature, its eyes seemed gay and it looked so happy."

Did the child mean to be funny who wrote: "I saw the Bees which is very plentiful, especially near the beehives."

Many of the children, girls as well as boys, do not seem to realize that dumb animals have any feelings; there are some sad stories of cruel torture to birds and insects, though from the way they are told I do think that ignorance and not wantonness is the cause.

A little girl writes: "Dear Madam,—I will try and tell you how, whilst away on my holiday, I saw a pig killed"; then follows a terribly detailed account, and the letter ends—"I have said more about the pig as it interested me mostly."

Four letters from girls who were staying near each other give accounts of the cruel way Mr. A. beat a donkey; three of the girls are furiously indignant, the fourth girl's account of the incident is—"Mr. A. beat the donkey cruel, but he did not like it throwing me off and hurting my stomach." We gather from all the letters that she was the man's favorite. "Mr. A. gave Mary a blackbird." "Mary always met Mr. A. coming from his work." "Mr. A. gave Mary a halfpenny every time she was bathed." Mary writes: "Mr. A. promised to send me a rabbit if I wrote to him."

There are curious scraps of information on a variety of subjects:—

"Shakespeare was the greatest grammarian and a skilful poet."

The groups of statuary round the Albert Memorial represent "Asia, Africa, America, and Jamaca."

"If you stroke a two week's old calf on the back it will die."

"A training ship is where all good boys go to live."

"Birds are the farmer's greatest enemy."

Here is an entirely satisfactory description of a windmill: "A windmill is like a lighthouse with combs round it."

When the time came to go home nearly all wish to stay longer, though expressing delight at the thought of seeing their parents again:

"I was opposite with coming and going, I did want to come, and I did not want to go."

Many of the letters end with grateful and thoughtful thanks; for instance, a boy writes: "I thank all who sent

us away, and all who paid for us, and all who took the trouble to see about us."

A girl ends her letter: "I hope you are enjoying yourself like I enjoyed myself. God bless you dear Madam. I hope I am Your Friend, A. B."

It is worthy of notice that there was only one postscript, and it was written by a girl. I quote it in full:

"Apples is ripe."

HARRIET SMEETON.

With reference to the article dealing with letters written by children of the Children's Country Holidays Fund, we are asked by its Chairman of Committee, Mrs. Barnett, to express the Committee's gratitude for the help given by ex-students of the House of Education. In many instances these have conducted Nature Rambles for the children before they went on their holiday, and in some few instances Talks were also given by them to groups of children collected in the various London schools. The Committee would be most grateful for further help in this direction in the coming year. Any ex-students whose posts are in or near London, and who would be able to have the children down to the country for Rambles, or to conduct them in the suburbs of London, or in any way to help forward the work of the Nature Study and Recreation Committee, are asked to communicate with the Secretary, Miss PHILP, 18, Buckingham Street, Strand. The keenness of the children, as shewn by the quotations in the article referred to, fully repays any efforts made to make the children's holiday fuller both of interest and enjoyment.

A NATURE WALK IN WINTER.

There could hardly be a better place than Filey Bay for getting broad notions of geology, for in the four or five miles between the White Rocks, near Flamborough Head on the south, and Filey Brigg on the north, at least three different layers of earth are exposed: chalk, clay, and a stratified rock, given as calcareous grit in the guide book.

The plane of these formations slopes gently up towards the north and also towards the west, an inclination that is not only evident in a single prominent slab of the Brigg, but is also the general tendency of the whole of Great Britain, where the oldest rocks come to the surface in the north of Scotland and in Wales.

"Yorkshire people are proud to know that the finest and loftiest cliffs of the chalk formation in all England are to be met with in their county at Speeton and Bempton. There the cliffs, composed wholly of chalk, present a perpendicular wall of rock some 400 feet!"

Thither I went along the sands at low tide. The southern limit of my walk was where the naked chalk first appeared, rising sheer above the slopes of earth and pebbles, made, doubtless, by debris from the cliffs. Such marks of stratification as are visible in the chalk show the same slope up towards the west. The shore is a beach of chalk pebbles. There are a few much larger rocks coloured like the Brigg. But the tide does not set in a direction that would bring boulders thence, and a comparison with other fragments convinced me that they were chalk, discoloured by long submergence, and eaten out by the sea and the mussels, acorn barnacles, and purpuræ which covered them. I could find no rock-boring shells such as I have seen near Beachy Head, in chalk reefs. There were veins of something crystalline, which I thought ought to be flint, but which looked more like quartz. Fragments of it helped to form the beach. The fringe of chalk pebbles at high-water mark continued across part of the next layer above the chalk, which is a black clay,